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ERIN EDGERTON, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Sue Haden rests her head against her mother, Margaret Tollefson, during a recent visit at Our Lady of Peace. Tollefson and other residents at OLOP received their second COVID-19 vaccine doses in February, paving the way to reopen the facility to visitors and for residents to venture out into the community again. Find more photos at DailyProgress.com.

Seniors enjoying return to more normal routines

Area facility residents, staff discuss coming out of difficult period

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Margaret Tollefson spent last Mother's Day in her apartment at Our Lady of Peace Retirement Community, and her daughter and grandchildren waved hello from the parking lot as she looked on from her window.

"That was different," Tollefson said from her third-floor apartment. "At least this time, I get to go to lunch."

She and her daughter, Sue Haden, aren't quite sure what they'll do for Mother's Day but

they know they'll be together in person. They are both fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

"We just like to be together and it doesn't make any difference what we see or do together," Tollefson said.

Tollefson and other residents at Our Lady of Peace received their second vaccine doses in February, paving the way to reopen the facility to visitors and for residents to venture out into the community again. State and federal officials eased restrictions on visits to long-term care facilities in mid-March as the pace of vaccinations increased.

The Our Lady of Peace community includes an assisted living option, the nursing center and a memory care unit. Because of the on-site nursing center, the

entire community has adhered to state and federal restrictions for nursing homes.

Early in the pandemic, Our Lady of Peace had a COVID-19 outbreak that resulted in 61 cases among residents and staff and 11 deaths, according to state data. Overall, in the Blue Ridge Health District, 357 cases, 28 hospitalizations and 32 deaths were linked to long-term care facilities since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

Since vaccination, the staff at Our Lady of Peace has worked to bring back meals in the dining room and social activities, though with restrictions such as masking and capacity limits. Still, residents are excited about

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Push on for 25-mile path to Afton area

Group is petitioning Albemarle leaders

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A movement is afoot to bring new life to long-talked-about plan for an approximately 25-mile shared-use path connecting Charlottesville to the Afton area.

The Rivanna Trails Foundation is petitioning the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors to move forward with a feasibility study of the path from city to the Blue Ridge Tunnel.

A Three Notched Trail has been discussed for a number of years, and supporters say it would not only serve outdoor enthusiasts, but also commuters and could bring tourists to the area — similar to what the Virginia Capital Trail has done for the Richmond-to-Williamsburg area.

Funding for the study was offered from the Virginia Department of Transportation last summer, but the county has decided not to move forward with it now due to staff capacity and overall capital project funding constraints.

"That's not to suggest that the county doesn't feel like this is a project that is worthy and even transformational," county spokeswoman Emily Kilroy said. "It's just that once you do these



DAILY PROGRESS FILE

The Three Notched Trail would connect Charlottesville to the Blue Ridge Tunnel in the Afton area, providing a path for walkers and cyclists and possibly increasing tourism in the region.

feasibility studies, if you don't have a reasonable expectation that you'll then make application and move forward with implementation, then by the time you come back to it later in 10 years, when we're ready to pay for it and later years when we're ready to really move forward with implementing it, enough can change that you really have to redo that work."

Allie Hill, a Rivanna Trails Foundation board member who also chairs the Three Notched Trail Committee, said they decided to create the petition now

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Autism causes differ by gender

UVa study could shed light on diagnosis gap

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They may look the same on the outside, but on the inside they are very different.

Similar autism-related behaviors in boys and girls are the result of different genetic variations and brain functions, according to a University of Virginia School of Medicine researcher who has long studied autism.

The discovery means there could be other autism-related behaviors that are less likely to be noticed in both girls and boys.

"You've got very similar symptoms, but the underlying brain differences that are related to the symptoms are very different," said Kevin Pelphrey, of UVa's Department of Neurology. "We've found evidence for brain networks that correlate with autism being different for boys and girls, and the genetics, the networks of genes involved,

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Seniors

From A1

getting back closer to normal.

"It's sort of a relief and a freedom that I could go out again," Tollefson said. "I could make my own decision about walking down the hall or whatever I wanted to do. I think that was probably good for all of us, just to know that I can walk out the door or I can walk out the hallway. It helps and gives us a little feeling of freedom anyway."

Now that she can leave the building, Tollefson wants to go shopping for a new blouse and toothpaste, to name a few of the items on her list.

"I've got five or six things that I want to look at," she said. "I might not be able to do all the walking. But again, I like the idea. Go shopping and look for what I want. Going to the market doesn't thrill me."

Haden was able to start visiting her mother when Our Lady of the Peace resumed scheduled, indoor visits in January. Now, she can also take her mother to doctor appointments off-site and on other outings. For Easter, they had lunch at the Timberwood Grill near Forest Lakes.

Not being able to see her mom in-person was difficult, Haden said. Having the chance to celebrate holidays together is liberating.

"It means so much to us," Haden said. "It was very isolating for [Mom] and for all of us — I mean we all went through that — and it was so hard with someone like mom, who was 96, not to be able to see her and not to be able to be with her."

"It's hard for everybody, honey," Tollefson added.

"She's a spicy lady," Haden replied. "We love her so much. We're thrilled to be able to be together again."

For the first three months of the pandemic, residents were confined to their rooms, and meals were delivered to their doors. For the staff at Our Lady of the Peace, it was all hands on deck to help residents through lockdown.

Tollefson said talking with friends over email and on phone calls helped her through the lockdown. She's lived at Our Lady of the Peace for almost three years.

During the lockdown, Haden said she checked in daily and made sure her mother's computer was running. That was her connection to the outside world via Facebook and email.

"She was doing puzzles a lot so we would make sure she got puzzles and made sure she got big-print books," she said.

For Tollefson, the lockdown became tiresome after a while.

"I would get to the point where I just wanted to go out the door and keep walking as long as I could," she said. "It wouldn't be very long right now. The idea was good."

Nurse Tonya Taylor

The last few months at Our Lady of the Peace have almost felt like a dream for Tonya Taylor, the assistant director of nursing who is a licensed practical nurse.

"It feels like, let me pinch myself, are we really, you know, [back]?"

After eight months of lockdowns and restrictions, Taylor is back to a more typical day. At the start of the lockdown, she worked in Our Lady of the Peace's memory care unit for people with dementia or Alzheimer's and stayed in that unit for three months.

COVID cases at Our Lady of the Peace were concentrated in the memory care unit and nursing center, Taylor said, but the staff was able to contain the virus' spread, preventing a wider outbreak. To do that, staff couldn't move between units, along with other measures.

Taylor said in her unit, they worked to contain it by treating all residents like they were positive and testing residents along with staff. Taylor also became the facility's point person for COVID testing; she's lost count of how many tests she's conducted over the last year.

To help treat residents who were sick, Our Lady of the Peace staff participated in daily calls with the COVID team at the University of Virginia Medical Center, who provided med-



ERIN EDGERTON PHOTOS, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Tonya Taylor, assistant director of nursing at Our Lady of the Peace, takes a call with a resident in her office.



Sam Mackey, a resident of Our Lady of the Peace, wears his trademark blue hat knitted by his mother. Mackey was his mother's caregiver before she died at 101.



Barbara Allison tends to flowers in her garden at Our Lady of the Peace. Allison leaned into her love of plants during the pandemic and turned a patio outside the facility's dining room into a garden.

ication regimens and orders. That information was essential, she said.

Her experience with COVID patients ensured that Taylor could receive the vaccine — and she didn't wait.

"Because seeing what those residents went through and what it can do to your body if you're symptomatic or asymptomatic, it's a lot worse than debating about a vaccine," she said.

Taylor has worked at Our Lady of the Peace for 27 years, starting as a CNA and working her way up the chain. She has stayed because the community is a family, she said. The staff now includes her two children, as well.

To help get through the last year, she reminded herself that she was taking care of God's children who cannot care for themselves.

"That's what got me through it," she said. "I didn't want them to see that I was as scared as I was, but I wasn't going to turn my back on them and leave them either."

The last year was hard work and

involved long hours, Taylor said.

"All you could do was just work and go home and take a shower and just get something to eat, rest and do it all over again," she said.

When lockdown lifted and she returned to her office in the main building, it was like a breath of fresh air, Taylor said. But all of her work as assistant director of nursing had piled up.

"So it took me a little while but I got it back right," she said.

Barbara Allison

Barbara Allison is in her glory outside in the garden at Our Lady of the Peace. An avid gardener, thanks to her mother, Allison found solace in seeding and tending to the plants, turning the community's patio outside the dining room into a garden with the help of a friend in the complex.

"I absolutely love it," she said.

She purchases seeds online. Our Lady of the Peace staff also helped to acquire tools and built her a storage shed. Before the shed, Allison stored

them in a cart that she would bring downstairs with help, if needed.

When the lockdown lifted in June, it was too late to plant seeds. They were able to talk a nursery into delivering some plants. She has since planned an array of annuals and, more recently, tomatoes and peppers, decorating the garden beds with ceramic rabbits and cats.

Allison moved to Our Lady of the Peace two years ago from a convent in Pennsylvania that was closing; her sister and niece live in the area.

Her sister has been visiting weekly since the restrictions eased — visits that still need to adhere to social distancing rules.

"So, no hugs," she said. "It's one of the biggest things that we all miss around here. Not that we run around hugging each other, but we can't. You're not allowed to walk up to a good friend and give them a hug."

As an introvert, the lockdown didn't bother Allison, she said.

"I love to read," she said in her

two-bedroom apartment. "I love to pray. I love to do artwork. I like to do puzzles. I like Words with Friends. I like my iPad. I was a happy camper. It didn't bother me, but everybody's different."

Pandemic restrictions also closed the chapel at Our Lady of the Peace, but Allison was able to watch Mass on TV daily and sermons online.

"My faith is everything to me; nothing else matters," she said. "And that's not to say I don't walk and cry and complain when the other stuff doesn't go well. But at this point in my life, nothing else matters."

As restrictions eased and activities started to resume, Allison said she and others came to appreciate the little steps to a new normal, from being able to leave their rooms to the dining room reopening. For months, residents were served meals in their rooms, and the dining room was one of the last things to return in January.

"Every little thing that came back, it was like: yes!" Allison said.

She's looking forward to more community events returning, such as lectures from UVA professors.

Through it all, Allison said the staff at Our Lady of the Peace has been fabulous.

"Because they not only had to take care of us when they went home, they had to be real careful," she said. "... They're always cheerful and kind and pleasant and helpful. The staff has been wonderful."

Sam Mackey

For years, Sam Mackey has used poetry to capture memorable moments, convey life lessons and entertain others. During the pandemic, he used rhyme and verse to boost the spirits of the Our Lady of the Peace staff and to document the last year, including when he was battling COVID.

"My original goal was to make sure spirits were up, and that the morale was maintained," Mackey said on a patio behind the nursing center where he lives at Our Lady of the Peace.

Drafts and final versions of his poems fill a large binder, a red spiral-bound notebook and two journals. Erin McKeon, director of marketing and admissions, said staff made sure he had his journals while he was sick in case he wanted to write.

McKeon and Mackey have bonded since he moved to Our Lady of the Peace two years ago. He's lived in the area since graduating from UVA.

In his poem "Resting Brain," he describes his battle with COVID.

"Deep, Deep, Deep, Deep/In a flickering recuperative sleep," he wrote. "Overwhelmed by impending strain/Recall God's controlled, the brain/Overwhelmed by stress and pain."

In an interview, Mackey said that when he became symptomatic with COVID, "the lights went out."

McKeon said Mackey was one of Our Lady of the Peace's miracle residents. He has fully recovered and doing better than ever, officials said.

For his poems, he draws inspiration from everyday life at Our Lady of the Peace, translating those elements through a more whimsical lens. For example, in one poem, a visitor outside a window became a fairy dancing on the window sill.

Mackey can recall many of his poems from memory — a necessity, he said, because he's not that organized and wanted to be able to share his work.

"I first waxed philosophical back in fourth grade," he said, adding that poetry writing resumed in earnest while he was a student at UVA.

He likes to play with language while trying not to produce too long of a poem. He became more philosophical while working as an engineer.

In 2018, he published a collection of his poems in "Well Versed Reality: A Poetic Version of Life As I See It."

Now, he writes up to two poems a day, which he shares with staff members and fellow residents.

"He gets a kick out of the smile it brings to us," McKeon said. "We all love getting these little poems," she told Mackey. "You make our day every time you do it. You've brought so much happiness to all of us."



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